



September 16, 2020

House Elections Committee
Rep. Stephanie Klick, Chair
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Chair Klick:

Emgage Action is an organization representing the Muslim community in Texas with chapters in Houston, Austin, and Dallas. Our policy issues of focus include voting rights, civil liberties, criminal justice reform and immigration reform. Emgage Action engages on these issues at the federal, state and local levels to discuss common sense solutions to some of our nation's biggest challenges.

We would like to provide comments in response to your request for information regarding interim charge #3 that directs the committee to *"evaluate election laws with the purpose of strengthening voter integrity and fair elections. Perform an in-depth study of the voter registration processes and explore whether centralizing voter registration would be more effective than today's processes. Consider ways to improve voter list maintenance and study the volunteer deputy registrar process and voter registration procedures in other states. Include in the evaluation a review of the state's curbside voting protocols and identify processes to improve the efficiency, privacy, and security of curbside voting."*

During the 2019 legislative session, the House and Senate considered Senate Bill 9 regarding voting integrity that addressed many of the issues that are contemplated in this interim charge. Emgage opposed SB 9 and believe many of the provisions in that legislation would result in voter suppression. As the committee considers this charge and develops recommendations for legislation, we would like to provide our comments on the problematic provisions of SB 9 and encourage the committee to not include these provisions in your recommendations for legislation.

Recommendations:

- Legislation should not threaten voters with jail time and fines for making innocent mistakes, such as filling out their voter registration form wrong.
- Legislation should not intimidate voters by weakening their right to a provisional ballot. Voters have a right to a provisional ballot when they sincerely believe they are eligible to vote and legislations should not expose them to possible jail time for doing so.
- Legislation should not create new red tape for those who need assistance while voting in particular elderly voters, voters with disabilities, and non-English speaking voters. Those who drive voters to

the polls and assist them while voting should not have to fill out burdensome new forms just to help people vote.

- Legislation should not inject partisanship into our elections by allowing partisan poll watchers to follow voters who need assistance into the privacy of the voting booth and watch them have their ballots marked.
- Legislation should not expand dangerous new powers to law enforcement by giving them complete legal immunity from prosecution for committing election-related crimes and allowing law enforcement to conduct undercover sting operations against community-based organizations.
- Legislation should not expose innocent people to arrest for vaguely defined conduct. Individuals who are assisting voters or exercising their right to free speech face should not face new, confusing penalties for “impeding a walkway, sidewalk, parking lot, or roadway” up to 500 feet from a polling place, an area larger than a football field.
- Legislation should not give state officials more access to voters’ private information. The Texas Attorney General should not be given direct access to the electronic voter registration database, which includes Social Security Numbers, Driver License Numbers, and other personal information.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and please contact me if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

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Cc:

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Rep. John H. Bucy III
Rep. Dustin Burrows
Rep. Briscoe Cain
Rep. Art Fierro
Rep. Celia Israel
Rep. Mayes Middleton
Rep. Valoree Swanson